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ABSTRACT

This brief summarizes the major findings of significant research studies dealing with different leadership behaviors and strategies for increasing leadership effectiveness. Fred Fiedler's Contingency Theory of Leadership Effectiveness emphasizes that a leader's effectiveness is determined by how well his leadership style fits the specific situation. Fiedler uses this theory to analyze the impact of training and experience on leadership effectiveness. Daniel Kunz and Wayne Hoy focus on the leadership behaviors of "initiating structure" and "consideration" and examine which behavior is more influential on teachers. Donald Piper compares the quality of problem-solving decisions made by individuals with the decisions made by groups and concludes that groups did consistently better than individuals. By comparing group members' reactions to three types of participative decision making, Carl Lowell demonstrates that the success of participative decision making depends on the method of governance used. The implications of these studies are that principals can do any of several things to increase their effectiveness as leaders, but insofar as leadership needs vary with different situations, there are no absolute guidelines for effective leadership. (Author/JG)

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Each ***Research Action Brief*** reports the findings of significant empirical research studies on a topic in educational management. From these findings implications are drawn for the operation of today's schools, thus serving as a guide for enlightened administrative action.

This ***Research Action Brief*** was prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management for distribution by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Leadership: Improving Its Effectiveness

At times, frustrated educators must wonder whether effective school leadership is not like good weather—a condition everyone wants but no one really knows how to produce. To carry the analogy further, just as people may disagree about what constitutes "good weather," so, too, effective school leadership can mean different things to different people.

Fortunately, these similarities are largely superficial. Although some aspects of leadership effectiveness are not yet completely understood, enough is known about the subject that a school principal interested in doing a better job can make use of strategies that certainly are more reliable than consulting bunions, doing rain dances, or seeding clouds.

Researchers have examined a wide range of questions about leadership. We will first consider the evidence that leadership effectiveness depends in part on the needs of specific situations. Next, we will discuss some effective types of leadership behavior. Finally, we will turn our attention to participative decision-making, a promising strategy for improving the process of decision-making on school policy.

Styles and Situations

Some researchers suggest that it may not be useful or even accurate to talk about leadership effectiveness as something that can exist apart from specific situations. Different leadership styles will be effective in different situations. In fact, while nearly everyone has what it takes to be an effective leader in some situations, almost no one can be a good leader in all situations.

Fiedler has done considerable research in this area. Although some of his work focuses on military, rather than educational, groups, his findings are useful in illuminating the nature of the leadership process itself.

Fiedler's basic conceptual tool is his Contingency Theory of Leadership Effectiveness, which emphasizes that a leader's effectiveness is determined by how well his or her leadership style fits the needs of a specific situation. Fiedler divides leaders into two types, those who are motivated by a desire for good interpersonal relations with subordinates (human relations-oriented) and those who are motivated by concern for accomplishing the task at hand (task-oriented).

Fiedler describes a situation in terms of its "favorableness." Three factors determine how favorable a situation is—the quality of leader-member relations in the group, the amount of structure imposed on tasks and assignments within the organization, and the amount of formal power that goes with the leader's position. As these three factors increase, so does favorability. It can vary from one extreme (where all three are present to a high degree) to the other (where all are absent), with a variety of intermediate combinations. Fiedler maintains there is no simple correlation between situational favorability and leadership effectiveness. In general, evidence suggests that human relations-oriented leaders are most effective in moderately favor-

able situations, while task-oriented leaders are at their best in very favorable or unfavorable situations.

Fiedler uses his contingency theory to analyze the impact of training and experience on leadership effectiveness. From his review of previous research and his own original work, Fiedler concludes that what training actually increases is not leadership effectiveness, but the favorability of the leader's situation. While certain types of leaders, in certain situations, will become more effective as the situation becomes more favorable, others will not. In addition, Fiedler suggests that experience, like training, tends to increase situational favorability. Thus an individual who has thoroughly mastered a job, like one who is overqualified for it, may lose interest in the work and actually perform less effectively than someone else who is less well qualified but more meaningfully challenged by the position.

Since leadership style, as a function of an individual's motivating structure and personality, is relatively permanent and difficult to change, Fiedler's work implicitly stresses the importance of the situation as the key to improving a leader's effectiveness. Just as training programs can make the leader's situation ***more*** favorable, so other approaches might be useful in making a situation ***less*** favorable, and, presumably, more challenging. One way of reducing favorability might be to increase uncertainty within an organization, for example, by introducing some type of innovation. Whatever is done should be planned in recognition of the fact that effective leadership means having the right individual in the right situation.

Leadership Behavior

Two areas of a leader's behavior that are often assumed to influence effectiveness are ***initiating structure*** (the ability to develop well-defined patterns within the organization, assign each member a clearly defined role, and open and maintain effective channels of communication) and ***consideration*** (success in creating a climate of trust, friendship, warmth, and mutual respect between a leader and his or her subordinates). In education, though not in industry, there is evidence that the most effective leaders are those who are strong in both areas. Teachers generally prefer principals who are high in consideration, while upper-level administrators favor principals strong in initiating structure.

Kunz and Hoy attempted to determine which of the two qualities was more important to effective leadership. To do this, they isolated one measure of effectiveness—a leader's success in gaining acceptance of his or her directives. Following the standard usage, the researchers identified three decisional areas where a principal might conceivably give orders. These were in the domains of organizational maintenance, personal behavior, and professional behavior. Most teachers evidently feel that matters relating to organizational maintenance, such as deadlines and accurate reports, are appropriate areas for administrative control. Conversely, most teachers, and many administrators, believe that the details of a teacher's personal life are, to put it bluntly, none of an administrator's business. Thus, in the organizational maintenance area, teachers are willing to accept a wide range of administrative control, while in the personal area they will accept very little.

But in the third area, the professional domain, which involves matters of professional judgment such as how to evaluate pupils or how responsive to be to administrative criticism, teachers vary widely in the amount of administrative control they are willing to accept.

As a result, Kunz and Hoy assumed that the amount of control teachers in a school were willing to accept over professional matters—the professional zone of acceptance—was a good measure of the principal's leadership effectiveness. Accordingly, the authors studied fifty randomly selected nonspecialized secondary schools in New Jersey to determine just how the size of this zone relates to a principal's leadership behavior.

The results of their survey indicate that teachers are most willing to accept the directives of principals who are high in both initiating structure and consideration. Further, the evi-

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dence also indicates that the two qualities very often go together. But when the authors investigated which of the two was more important, they found, contrary to their expectations, that initiating structure was more influential than consideration in determining the size of a teacher's professional zone of acceptance. While this contradicts the findings of some earlier research, it is consistent with the conclusions of a small but growing body of recent work.

Kunz and Hoy's study has a wide range of implications for effective leadership. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that leadership behavior ***can***—at least in its influence on the size of a teacher's professional zone of acceptance—help determine a leader's effectiveness. The most effective principals are strong in both initiating structure and consideration. However, the two are not of equal importance; apparently, teachers are more likely to accept administrative directives in a well-organized school than in a friendly one.

While these findings themselves are important, Kunz and Hoy's study also points out that teachers are more willing to accept administrative control in some areas than in others. Most teachers, for example, consider organizational matters as legitimate territory for strong administrative direction. Thus a principal need not be reluctant to take a greater measure of control over matters such as those Kunz and Hoy include within this domain—deadlines, maintenance of school equipment, participation in inservice programs, and the accuracy of reports. Indeed, taking a more active leadership role in these areas might be one useful way for a principal to begin to become more effective in initiating structure.

Conversely, the almost universal rejection of principal authority over personal matters is also significant. Principals are apparently ill-advised to attempt to control personal, nonprofessional details of teachers' lives, either as a standing policy or as part of an effort to exercise "stronger leadership." Such efforts are likely to be resisted and resented.

Participative Decision-Making

One important measure of leadership effectiveness is the principal's ability to make wise decisions about school policy. A promising approach to increasing the principal's skill in this area is participatory decision-making (PDM). PDM is based on the assumption that the best way for a school to identify its needs and develop policies to meet them is by involving in the decision-making process a wide range of people who can work together to exchange insights and ideas.

Several empirical research efforts have considered the value of PDM. Piper compared the quality of the problem-solving decisons individuals made alone with those they made working in groups. The researcher first gave each individual subject a test that required making a series of decisions. While members of a control group simply retook the test individually, the remaining subjects were divided into three types of groups for retesting. One type (consensus) had no leaders; group members discussed the problems until they reached solutions that were accepted—though not necessarily agreed upon—by everyone in the group. In the second type of group (participative-best), the individual who had scored highest on the test was chosen group leader and given the responsibility for making decisions after eliciting advice from the rest of the group. The third type (participative-worst) worked the same way, except that individuals with the lowest scores were designated as leaders.

Groups in the study consistently did better than individuals. Each consensus group made decisions that were better than those of its average member, and several such groups actually outperformed even their best individuals. In each participative group, leaders made better decisions with help than they had made when working alone. This was true whether the leader was the best or worst individual test-taker in the group. While the improvement of the participative-worst group leaders was to be expected, that of the participative-best leaders was surprising and significant. It suggests that even a knowledgeable individual can benefit from the good advice of associates without running much risk of being influenced by bad advice. These findings led Piper to conclude that "if arriving at the most correct decision is the primary goal, the involvement of several people . . . will provide better results than the 'one-man-deciding alone' model."

The results achieved with PDM depend on the method of governance used. Lowell demonstrated this when he compared group members' reactions to three different types of participation—consensus, majority-vote, and leader-controlled (centralist).

Members of consensus groups, who shared power equally, were well satisfied both with the decisions their groups reached and the process used to reach them. Members of centralist groups, where leaders made decisions after consulting with the groups, were also satisfied with the decision-making process and its outcomes.

However, contrary to Lowell's expectations groups governed by majority vote worked far less satisfactorily. Members of these groups were less satisfied with group decisions and with the decision-making process itself. In fact, Lowell reports that the atmosphere in some of these groups became openly competitive, as advocates of differing solutions struggled with each other for control of the decision.

Implications

Our discussion has focused on three different measures of school leadership effectiveness. One set of findings emphasizes the role of the situation in determining what constitutes effective leadership. A second set focuses on the ways certain types of behavior can influence a leader's effectiveness. And the third section of the discussion considers a process for improving school decision-making.

Fiedler's work is most useful for illustrating the need to match leadership style with the needs of a situation. Because leadership style is determined by an individual's personality—which may be difficult to change—it is important to focus attention on ways to manipulate situational variables to make leadership more effective. This may even mean, on occasion,

actually attempting to ***reduce*** situational favorability. In any case, the most important thing is to recognize that a safe, secure, and well-ordered environment may not always be a productive one.

Kunz and Hoy's work, which deals specifically with secondary school principals, focuses on how two types of leadership behavior— establishing order in the school environment (initiating structure) and developing good relations with subordinates (consideration)—can influence teachers' willingness to accept a principal's directives. Both types of behavior, which seem to go together in the most effective leaders, are important, though maintaining a well-ordered school is apparently more desirable than maintaining a friendly one.

Kunz and Hoy also showed, almost incidentally, that most teachers are relatively willing to accept administrative control over organizational matters, but not over their personal affairs. Thus it may be useful for a principal to confine attention to supervising the organizational details of school life.

In the area of school decision-making, there is evidence that participative decision-making can have several desirable effects. Piper's work clearly suggests that PDM can, indeed, foster the making of better, more correct decisons. The fact that the quality of a leader's decisions can be improved, but cannot be damaged, by the advice of other, less knowledgeable group members suggests that the risks of PDM are small.

Lowell's findings point the way toward the most effective form for PDM in a school situation. Consensus decision-making can yield satisfactory results. In large groups, however, striving for consensus can be a complex, time-consuming process. Piper did find, as well, that consensus groups do not always solve problems as effectively as their best individuals. For this reason principals may be reluctant to yield their decision-making authority to such groups. For many schools, therefore, a centralist PDM program may be most desirable, with the principal, as group leader, soliciting the opinions and insights of collaborators but retaining final decisional authority. If the leader is genuinely open to the influence of group members, this approach can satisfy participants and improve the quality of decisions. A key factor in both studies seems to be the feeling on the part of participants that their advice had been heeded.

If Lowell's work suggests some possible "do's" for school principals, it also, rather emphatically, suggests a "don't." A PDM program should not be based on the principle of majority rule. Majority-vote groups can become competitive rather than collaborative (hardly desirable for a principal interested in high initiating structure).

These studies considered as a whole show that principals can do any of several things to improve their effectiveness as leaders: initiate more structure in the school environment, improve relations with subordinates, and develop programs of participatory decision-making. But insofar as leadership needs vary with different situations, there are no absolute guidelines for effectiveness; each principal should work to develop the leadership approach that works best for him or for her.

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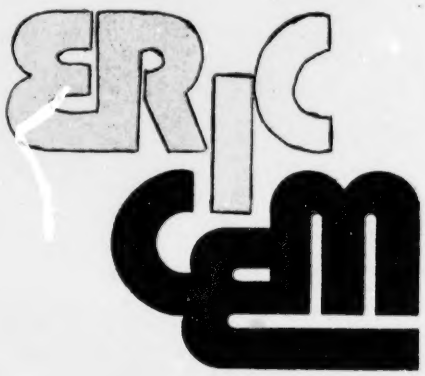

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